Information Bulletin



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UPDATE FOR FIRST RESPONDERS: PROCEDURES FOR SUSPICIOUS ENVELOPES, PACKAGES, POWDER¹

September 2, 2003

During a period of elevated public concern over potential terrorism acts, there can be an increased number of calls to first responders to deal with suspicious powders and packages. In the Fall of 2001, a number of state, federal and local agencies in Washington came together to develop recommended guidelines for responding to such calls. We are issuing an update to those guidelines to assist first responders and local health agencies as they deal with these calls now and in the future.

It is essential for first responders to involve the appropriate local health agency early in the response process, before performing any field tests, sending a sample to the state laboratories or deciding on a course of action. Local health agencies serve as the community experts on bioterrorism detection and response, and need to be included early so that they can advise the first responders and other affected organizations on appropriate actions to take to protect the health of everyone involved. The Washington State Public Health Laboratories will not accept samples unless they have been coordinated through the appropriate local health agency.

To date, none of the incidents involving suspicious envelopes, packages, powder on the ground, etc., in Washington, have proven to be anthrax or any other biological agent. Nevertheless, there is still a need to be watchful, should a valid threat appear.

¹ This document was adapted from the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services Law Enforcement Branch "Update for First Responders, October 23, 2001."

A balanced, reasoned response is needed by all first responders to establish the credibility and conduct a threat assessment to ascertain the level of threat. Please consider these guidelines, and compare them with local policies, procedures and protocols. As always, local protocols should take precedence. The guidelines described here may be used to supplement local policies, or considered when no local guidelines exist.

A. Level of Threat

- Level 0 Envelope or package with no threat and no unusual or unknown material (powder, liquid, etc.).
- Level 1 Envelope or package with an articulated threat, but no unusual or unknown material.
- Level 2 Envelope or package with an unusual or unknown material (powder, liquid, etc.) but no articulated threat.
- Level 3 Envelope or package with an articulated threat and some unknown or unusual material inside or spilled from it

B. Key Indicators of a Credible Threat

- 1. Envelope or package contains some form of an articulated threat (written threat, photos, etc.)
- 2. An articulated threat was conveyed to that location, business or person by E-mail, telephone message, etc.
- 3. Some type of material such as powder, liquid, which cannot be easily explained as usual or common for that item, area or location is detected in the envelope or package.
- 4. The recipient, addressee or the site at which the item was received is a likely target.

C. Response Guidelines by Level

(See Appendix A and B for guideline chart and decision matrix.)

Level 0 Envelope or package with no threat and no unusual or unknown material contained – but the reporting party believes it is suspicious

• Discuss the situation with the reporting party.

- No emergency response necessary unless you suspect a possible explosive device, or information suggests a higher-level response.
- Personal Protective Equipment: Gloves

Decontamination and Disposal:

Remove gloves following standard protocols and properly dispose the gloves.

Wash hands with soap and water.

Refer to *Section E. Treatment* and *Section H. Disposal* for further information.

Level 1 Envelope, package or location with an articulated chemical, biological or radiological threat, but no unusual or unknown material

- If after evaluating the threat and it is deemed not credible, complete a written report and conduct an investigation.
- Seize the evidence and follow normal evidence collection and packaging procedures.
- Notify the FBI prior to transport.
- Send a copy of the report to appropriate agency.
- If after evaluating the text of the threat and it is deemed credible respond accordingly or proceed to level 2.
- Personnel Protective Equipment: Gloves.

Decontamination and Disposal:

Remove gloves following standard protocols for handling hazardous materials and properly dispose.

Wash your hands with soap and water.

Refer to *Section E. Treatment* and *Section H. Disposal* for further information.

Level 2 Envelope, package or location with an unusual or unknown material (powder, liquid, etc.) but no articulated threat

- Contact and coordinate the response with the appropriate local health agency.
- Personal Protective Equipment: Gloves, HEPA or P–95 respiratory protection and eye protection.
- If the item is unopened gently place the item into a clear plastic bag (size appropriate to sample or package), and apply a Biohazard sticker or other appropriate identification.

 Remove your gloves following standard protocols for hazardous materials and dispose.

AND

- Follow local biohazard or hazardous materials protocols to enable the following to occur:
 - Screen for chemical, explosive, and radiological agents.
 - ❖ Washington State Department of Health does not recommend using field tests for biological agents. Such testing methods are neither sensitive nor specific, meaning that there are likely to produce false positive or false negative results, leading to unnecessary concern and action.
 - ❖ It is especially important that field tests not be used if only a small or minute amount of material exists, so as not to compromise the ability of the Washington State Public Health Laboratories to perform confirmatory tests.
- Tests to confirm the presence of biological agents will need to be conducted at the Washington State Public Health Laboratories in Shoreline, see Section D, Sample Handling.
- Notify the FBI if field testing for chemical, radiological or explosive is suggestive of terrorism.

OR

- If results from the Washington State Public Health Laboratories are negative law enforcement proceeds with criminal investigation.
- Complete a written report.
- Send a copy of the report to the appropriate agency.

Decontamination and Disposal:

Decontaminate HEPA or P-95 respirator per protocols.

Remove eye protection and gloves and properly dispose of gloves. Wash hands with soap and water.

Refer to *Section E. Treatment* and *Section H. Disposal* for further information.

Level 3 Envelope, package or location with an articulated threat and some unusual or unknown material inside or spilled from it

• Contact and coordinate with the appropriate local health agency.

- Personal Protective Equipment: Gloves, HEPA or P–95 Respiratory Protection and Eye Protection.
- Follow Level 2 handling procedures if materials confined. If materials are spilled, contain the spilled materials and secure the area to prevent entry.
- Notify the FBI immediately (prior to transport).

AND

- Follow local biohazard or hazardous material handling protocol to enable the following to occur:
 - Screen for chemical, explosive and radiological agents.
 - ❖ Washington State Department of Health does not recommend using field tests for biological agents. Such testing methods are neither sensitive nor specific, meaning that there are likely to produce false positive or false negative results, leading to unnecessary concern and action.
 - ❖ It is especially important that field tests not be used if only a small or minute amount of material exists, so as not to compromise the ability of the Washington State Public Health Laboratories to perform confirmatory tests.
- If credible, or positive for hazardous agents, the FBI will respond and interface with the Incident Commander.
- Tests to confirm the presence of biological agents will need to be conducted at the Washington State Public Health Laboratories in Shoreline, see Section D, Sample Handling.

OR

- If results are negative law enforcement proceeds with criminal investigation.
- Complete a written report.
- Send a copy of the report to appropriate agency.

Decontamination and Disposal:

Decontaminate HEPA or P-95 respirator per protocols.

Remove eye protection and gloves following standard protocols and properly dispose.

Wash your hands with soap and water.

Seek local hazardous materials/public health advice on further clothing and personal decontamination.

Refer to Section E. Treatment and Section H. Disposal for further information.

D. Sample Handling

Based on the risk assessment, some samples may not require immediate, if any laboratory analysis. If the Washington State Public Health Laboratories are unable to immediately accept the sample, the law enforcement agency, fire department, and local health agency should coordinate for local storage and subsequent transport of the sample. Appropriate chain-of-custody measures should be observed for possible prosecution or further action.

If responding agencies determine that a package or substance may present a credible threat, they must consult with the responsible local health department and notify the FBI. Once a decision has been made by the local health department and law enforcement that a specimen warrants testing, use the following guidelines to package and transport the specimen to the Washington State Department of Health Public Health Laboratories. No specimen will be accepted at the Washington State Public Health Laboratories unless the responsible local health department and Washington State Communicable Disease Epidemiology (1-877-539-4344) have been contacted prior to arrival of the specimen. Chain of Custody documentation must also accompany each specimen.

Packaging specimens for testing

It is recommended that any specimen with a credible threat or unusual substance should be screened for chemical, radiological, or explosive materials (unless there is not enough material available for field testing) before it can be processed by the Washington State Public Health Laboratories. Documentation of any screening must accompany the specimen to the laboratory.

POWDERS

- Place the specimen or a representative sample of the specimen in a plastic zip-lock bag, wipe the outside of bag with a solution of 9 parts water and 1 part household bleach, place a biohazard label on the bag, and follow steps 1-4. Bleach solution should be made fresh each day of use.
 - Place the zip-lock bag into a leak proof container with a tight cover that is labeled "biohazard."
 - Place this container into a second leak proof container with a tight cover that is labeled "biohazard." The size of the second container should be less than a one-gallon paint can.
 - Place the second container into a third leak proof container that is labeled "biohazard." The third container should be no larger than a one-gallon paint can.
 - Containers should meet state and federal regulations for transport of hazardous material, and be properly labeled.

UPDATE FOR FIRST RESPONDERS September 2, 2003 Page 7

LIQUIDS

- Liquids must be screened for chemical, explosives and toxins before sending samples to the Washington State Public Health Laboratories.
- If possible liquids should be transferred to a plastic container, if there is a large amount of liquid a sample should be collected in a 100ml screw top plastic container.
- Wrap the container with absorbent material (enough to absorb the full amount of liquid) an place a ziplock bag, wipe the outside of the bag with a solution of 9 parts water and 1 part household bleach, and follow steps 1-4 above.

Transporting specimens to the Washington State Department of Health Public Health Laboratories

No specimens will be accepted unless the Washington State Public Health Laboratories has been contacted prior to arrival of the specimen. **Specimens must be coordinated with the local health department first** and then the Public Health Laboratory by calling Washington State Communicable Disease Epidemiology at 1-877-539-4344, a 24-hour emergency phone number.

In most situations, local law enforcement, HAZMAT, Washington State Patrol or a FBI representative will transport the specimen directly to the Washington State Public Health Laboratories located at 1610 150th Street NE in Shoreline. Driving directions from I 5: Take exit N.E. 145th St. (WA-523); head east on 145th Ave NE; turn LEFT onto 15th Ave NE; turn RIGHT on NE 150th; the Washington State Public Health Laboratories will be on your left.

In cases where the specimen is shipped by commercial carrier, ship according to State and Federal shipping regulations.

Local agencies have the primary responsibility to ensure samples are properly packaged and transported. If a local agency becomes overwhelmed due to the magnitude of the incident or a request based on exigent circumstances the Washington State Patrol or the FBI could respond to transport properly packaged samples from the local jurisdiction.

If there are exigent circumstances, requests should be made through the local Washington State Patrol District offices. The final decision will be determined by the District Commander on a case-by-case basis.

The following guidelines should be used in assessing whether or not the incident meets the exigent circumstances rule:

- Local jurisdiction resources are exhausted
- ☐ Gravity of the incident (isolated event vs. mass casualty incident)
- ☐ If after normal business hours or on weekends, the Washington State Health Laboratories must agree to have personnel available to receive the sample
- Credibility of Threat Level
- □ Availability of Washington State Patrol resources

E. Biological Agent Decontamination Guidelines for First Responders

- 1. Contamination: Highly unlikely or non-existent
 - Field decontamination of civilians is not needed and is not recommended.

2. Contamination: Slightly likely

- Field decontamination is not recommended.
- Routine hand washing with warm water and soap for one minute is recommended.
- People at the location may be released to return home.
- A routine body shower (warm soap and water) is recommended.
- They should wash their clothes in a washer and dryer with laundry detergent.
- Name and contact information should be forwarded to the local health official for documentation, and case follow up as necessary.

3. Contamination: Highly likely to confirmed

- Field decontamination is recommended.
- If in Level B PPE, decontaminate with .5% bleach solution or copious amounts of soap and water. Remove PPE and respiratory protection, decontaminate respiratory equipment as needed and dispose of remaining materials properly.
- If interior clothing is potentially contaminated, remove, bag and label. Store securely until diagnostic testing can be completed.
- Issue modesty or replacement clothing as needed.
- After proper field decontamination, transport individuals to a facility for routine body shower with warm water and soap.
- Name and point of contact information should be forwarded to local health official for documentation and case follow up.
- People can then be released.

NOTE: The guidelines listed above are minimum, unless advised, altered, or recommended otherwise by acknowledged emergency services personnel or local health officer.

F. Biological Agent Questionnaire

Include these inquiries in completing your local written report of the incident.

1. Victim

- Obtain the full name, sex, date-of-birth, addresses (work and home), telephone numbers (home, work, cellular) and driver's license number of victim.
- Is the suspicious envelope or package at a residence or business? If it is a business, obtain business name, address, and type of business.
- What is the occupation/employment of the victim? What are the victim's duties?
- Has the victim received threats by mail or telephone before? If yes, give details.
- Why does the victim think that he/she would be targeted?

2. Envelope/Package

- Who or what is listed as the addressee on the envelope?
- Who or what is listed as the return address on the envelope?
- Is the victim familiar with the sender?
- Is the envelope typewritten or handwritten?
- Does the envelope have a postmark? Where?
- Does the envelope have a stamp? What kind of stamp? How many?
- Is there a meter strip?
- What kind of the envelope (business, personal, etc.)?
- How was the envelope sealed (tape, adhesive, etc.)?
- Are there any additional markings on the exterior of letter?
- Are there any stains on the exterior of the letter? Describe.

3. Letter (if the envelope was opened)

- Obtain summary of content of letter.
- Is there an overt threat contained within the letter? Provide exact wording. Are there any stains visible on the letter?

4. Foreign material within the envelope/package

Describe material found within envelope/package Solid material

- What is the color of the material?
- Describe granule size and shape (e.g. similar to sugar or powder)
- Does the material have an obvious odor? (**Do not purposely inhale**.)
- Did the material appear to become airborne upon opening?

Liquid

- Describe the container size, type, and material (e.g. glass or plastic).
- What is the color of liquid?
- Is the liquid transparent or opaque?

- Does the material have an obvious odor? (**Do not purposely inhale**.)
- Is the liquid leaking from the container?

5. Exposure

- When was the envelope received (date and time)?
- What was the mode of delivery (USPS, FedEx, etc.)?
- Where is the envelope and letter currently?
- What areas of the body were exposed to the material?
- Was there a spill? If so, how large?
- How many others (record names and contact information) had contact with the envelope or product?
- What furniture might be contaminated?

6. Health

- Is the victim experiencing any physical symptoms? What are the symptoms?
- How long after exposure did the symptoms occur?
- Has the victim already seen a doctor? If yes, obtain the name and contact information for doctor.

H. Recommended Disposal Procedures

Level 0 Envelope or package with no threat and no unusual or unknown material contained but the reporting party believes it is suspicious:

- Release to mail handler for routine delivery, or to addressee
- May be disposed into ordinary refuse waste
- If addressee is apprehensive about receipt of letter or package, refer to recommendation in Level 1 (below)

Level 1 Envelope, package or location with an articulated written chemical, biological or radiological threat, but no unusual or unknown material

- If determined to be non-credible, and no longer needed as evidence for criminal investigation, release to mail handler or addressee.
- If addressee is apprehensive and refuses letter or package, or in the absence of the addressee, destroy in accordance with law enforcement procedures and dispose in ordinary refuse waste.
- If determined to be credible, retain in accordance with law enforcement evidence seizure and documentation. Upon conclusion of

- criminal investigation, including court obligations, enter into evidence storage in accordance with guidelines per the prosecutor's office.
- If released from investigation or evidence storage, and is no longer needed to be retained, release to mail handler or addressee. If addressee is apprehensive and refuses letter or package, or in the absence of the addressee, destroy in accordance with law enforcement procedures, (including shredding), and dispose into ordinary refuse waste.

Level 2 Envelope, package or location with an unusual or unknown material (powder, liquid, etc.) but no articulated threat:

- If determined to be non-credible and non-hazardous, release to mail handler or addressee. If addressee is apprehensive and refuses letter or package, or in absence of the addressee, dispose into ordinary refuse waste.
- If determined to be credible, retain in accordance with law enforcement evidence seizure and documentation. Upon conclusion of criminal investigation, including court obligations, enter into evidence storage in accordance with guidelines per the prosecutor's office.
- If released from investigation or evidence storage, and no longer needs to be retained, after determining the material is non-hazardous, destroy and dispose in accordance with recommendations from the local health agency. One method to consider is to include it in the local biohazard medical waste process for disposal.

Level 3 Envelope, package or location with an articulated threat and some unusual or unknown material inside or spilled from it:

- If determined to be non-credible and non-hazardous, release to mail handler or addressee. If addressee is apprehensive and refuses letter or package, or in absence of the addressee, dispose into ordinary refuse waste.
- If determined to be credible, retain in accordance with law enforcement evidence seizure and documentation. Upon conclusion of criminal investigation, including court obligations, enter into evidence storage in accordance with guidelines per the prosecutor's office.
- If released from investigation or evidence storage, and no longer needs to be retained, destroy and dispose in accordance with recommendations from the local health agency. One method to consider is to include it in the local biohazard medical waste process for disposal.